Journal of the Washington County Historical Society

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Washington County Historical Society

118 East Dickson Street, Fayetteville, AR 72701

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FLASHBACK

Journal of
the Washington County Historical Society

Volume 56 **Summer 2006** **Number**

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Cover: A postcard view of City Park swimming pool and tourist camp, Fayetteville, Arkansas (Courtesy David Huff of Bob's Studio of Photography).

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Thomas A. DeBlack presented the Best Church History award to Brent Riffel for his article, "A Celebration of Endurance: Fayetteville's St. James United Methodist Church," at the Arkansas Historical Association's annual meeting in April 2005. The article appeared in the Autumn 2005 issue of *Flashback* (Courtesy Arkansas Historical Association.)

THREE WOMEN SPEAK: INTEGRATION AT FAYETTEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

ANDREW PRICE BRILL

Editor's note: The following interviews have been edited for clarity while remaining faithful to the speaker's intent.

In 1954 Fayetteville High School and the Charleston, Arkansas, public schools became the first schools in the South to integrate following *Brown v. Board of Education.* In May 1954 the United States Supreme Court ruled that "separate but equal" schooling was inherently unfair and declared that desegregation should begin with "all deliberate speed." With a week the Fayetteville School Board announced it would desegregate that coming fall, and in September seven black students walked into Fayetteville High School, making Fayettevile the first publicly integrated school district in the South. May 2006 represents the fiftieth anniversary of the graduation of the first integrated class. These interviews with Peggy Taylor Lewis, Feriba McNair, and Nancy L. Cole Mays were conducted in January 2003, as research on the integration process in the Fayetteville public schools.

Andrew Brill grew up in Fayetteville and graduated from Fayetteville High School He conducted these interviews while a student at Austin College in Sherman, Texas. Currently he is a graduate student at Boston College. He wishes to thank Peggy Lewis, Nancy Mays, and Feriba McNair for their gracious willingness to participate in this project. The results of his research appear in *School Desegregation without Violence: Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1954–1965*, which is on file at various Washington County libraries. A revised version will appear in the Winter 2006 issue of *Arkansas Historical Quarterly.*

Peggy (Taylor) Lewis attended school in Cane Hill and Fort Smith and at Fayetteville's Lincoln School prior to school integration in 1954. She was a high school junior in 1954 when she, along with six other black students, became the first black students to publicly attend a formerly all-white school. In May 1956 she and Preston Lackey were the first of these seven students to graduate. Lewis and her husband currently reside in Van Buren, Arkansas.

AB: It was 1954 when you first attended Fayetteville High School?
PL: Yes, fifty-four. I started when school started in September. And there were was six of us, I believe, at the time. We did not go as a group because Preston lived one place, and I lived somewhere else, and Virginia and her sister lived someplace else. So we went in small groups. Preston went with some of the young men who were there at the school. The dad of one of the young men [David McClinton] was on the board, and he [Clark McClinton] had voted for this integration. Some students were giving David a hard time, so he and some more young men met Preston at one side of the school and walked him in. And I think I came in from the east side and Virginia Lee came in from the other. But the children that met us, they were just as nice as they could be. And we just thought, we know they're here to show us where to go and where everything is and to help us that day. We had helpers for a day or so to keep us going around. It went from there; we could join anything that was going on at the school. We could have a part in it. But I did not have transportation to go back to nighttime things. I did join the Glee Club and the choir, and I think Preston joined the shop and something else.
AB: I think I read that he was on Student Council.

PL: He was on Student Council. He and I had the same homeroom, but we kind of went different ways—we didn't have any classes together, just homeroom. We had a wonderful homeroom teacher. She made us feel so welcome, and I guess that's one reason we did not realize what was really going on. As I say, we went quietly—we did not have a lot of problems. One lady was picketing outside, but that was her right. I didn't think anything about it, and as for problems, there weren't any because everybody was just as helpful as they could be. And Mrs. Bell was the principal at the time. She was so nice. All my teachers were helpful. I was there two years. I graduated with a class of over two hundred. I discovered that this was such a problem when I went to Little Rock. I went to Philander Smith College in fifty-six.

AB: So after you graduated, you went to Philander Smith?

PL: I went to Philander that September. When I got down there, I had to sit in the back of the bus, and I thought, "What's the deal?" I didn't think anything of it because most of the time that's where we were sitting anyway. I lived in the neighborhood behind Mrs. Daisy Bates. So that was quite an experience for me because she had a lot of input into the integration there. I didn't know her personally, but I knew that she was in the house behind us. It wasn't unusual for the National Guard to come by at 10:30, 11 o'clock and tell us we had to leave because there was a bomb threat or something. We'd have to stay away a day or two. So a lady I roomed with had a friend about two blocks away. We would go stay away from home about two days and come back. I was there when they were throwing bombs at Daisy Bates's house and set her living room on fire. And they set the professor's (he was from Germany, I believe) garage on fire. It was across the street from me on the corner. I really didn't know what was behind all of it because I walked from Cross Street to Ninth Street, and that

was a good eight or ten blocks. I didn't have any problems, but they were having such a hard time there. And I rode the bus. I worked way out by the university for a family after school a day or two a week. At one time I worked for a family in Fayetteville and came to find out their daughter and I graduated together, and she didn't realize all this had gone on. When we had a reunion at forty-five years, she said to me, "Well, Peggy, I didn't dream that you all were being treated that way." She said, "We didn't have any problem; we thought people were people." I said, "Well, I didn't either." As I say, there was something else I wanted in life and the little bitty things that went on didn't affect me. It didn't bother me because I came up a rough road, and I knew in order to get out of this situation and do a little better, I was going to have to strive and overcome a lot of things. When it all boiled down, it might have made me a better person. But there again, it goes back to the family. It goes back to the family with the discipline and what have you. Because being a person of color, anybody could correct me at the time when I was a child. Because I knew [to obey] if they said, "you go straight home" or "you're not supposed to be over there." Wasn't nothing said. But nowadays you say something to these children, any of them, you may have a lawsuit or everybody in town on your porch. I think a lot of it has to do with the family. We didn't have a whole lot but we were a close-knit family. I had a lot of relatives in Fayetteville, when we moved there. Most of the children, if I'm not mistaken, that went into the senior high at that time came out of Cane Hill. Joseph Manuel and Wayne Morgan may not have. I know Joseph Manuel didn't. It was just good to have an opportunity, because we were so used to that one-room schoolhouse. We thought we were going to the big city. I just really don't know what to think, because I think if it went on nowadays, it would be a struggle. I really do. But as I say, that went so peacefully,

and we did not have any problems; I'm really thankful. And as I say, my biggest eye-opening was when I when I went to Philander in September.

AB: I was going to ask you a couple of questions about Lincoln School, which was the school you went to in Fayetteville. Now it was obviously bigger than the school in Cane Hill, so it was four or five rooms?

PL: Yes, because [in Cane Hill] we just had one room and long desks where three people could sit together in one seat, and there was just about maybe fifteen of us; it wasn't a whole lot of children. When we went to Lincoln in Fayetteville, we had one teacher, but we had all the grades. We stayed in one room, but one teacher taught two or three grades.

AB: And did they have classes like work preparation stuff, like homemaking for the girls, or woodworking for the guys?

PL: No, there were no extra activities, special like that.

AB: I didn't know if it was like a vocational school.

PL: No, no, it was just first grade, second grade, third grade, and on up through there. We had spelling bees amongst ourselves. We had a May Day sometimes or spring activities. But we did not have anything like teaching and woodworking and girls' homemaking and stuff like that.

AB: Did you know much about the white schools? Did you have any interaction with those schools at all?

PL: Not going to the black school. We knew the children were there, and they had their own school. And we thought, "Well, it's in their district and that's where they go, and this is where we go." And when I had home ec, I was in tenth grade at Lincoln High in Fort Smith. There was woodworking for the boys, shop as they called it, and other things to do.

AB: Did you feel like Lincoln was a good school? Did you ever feel that you were in a worse situation because you didn't get to go to the white school or that the whites had better education?

PL: I don't think so, because we really had a well-rounded teacher. She was real good. But I look back now and I can see that if we would have had some of the tools and things in teaching, and as you say, home ec and counseling and shop and what have you—that would have been helpful, but by us not being exposed to it, it really didn't make us feel any, I guess you would say, less important because we just thought, "They do like we do." And really, when we found out that there was home ec and shop and what have you for the girls and the boys, it was good to know. You could get in if you wanted to be a farmer of tomorrow or teacher. There were groups like that, and if you needed help in your lesson, the teachers would stay and help you. But just one teacher teaching twenty-five, thirty children, she couldn't hardly. We really helped each other; she would give eight or ten of us an assignment, and she'd put us at one end of the room, and she would say, "You all work quietly but work together and help so and so if he's having problems." If one of us knew it, she would let us be in charge, and we would help each other. But now today there's so much more stuff—computers and the churches are helping, and we just didn't have all that. It just blew my mind, I didn't dream that something like that could cause as much trouble as they had when it got to Little Rock. And what it did, it hurt because we just got different colors of skin, we all got red blood... But anyway, it was two good years [at FHS]. I enjoyed it. They'll always be special.

AB: Do you remember any discrimination in Fayetteville, in the town itself, like anywhere you couldn't go or any restaurants you couldn't go in or anything like that?

PL: Well, most of us, when we went to the show we had to sit in the balcony. Now, as far as restaurants go, we didn't have any money. That kept a lot of us out, but people that did go to places had to go to the back door to go in or what have you. I'm

sure it was there, but my circumstances did not put me out there where I came in contact with that kind of problem. The show was probably the only place, because I could find a dime and go to the show on Saturdays, and I did have to sit in the balcony.

AB: From what I've read, there were four hundred or so blacks in Fayetteville and they all lived in the same area of town. Was the community there pretty close? Did you know a lot of the people and was it a pretty close community? I read that most people went to St. James Baptist or St. James Methodist and so you pretty much knew everybody?

PL: Yes, they were just right there, I'll say, from the courthouse in Fayetteville down to Jefferson School in the valley and maybe up to Mt. Sequoyah. That was the area were most of them settled. And a lot of those folks came out of Cane Hill and Lincoln. I knew a lot of them. A lot of them did go to St. James Baptist Church. That's where we all started out as kids.

AB: Why did everybody move to Fayetteville from Cane Hill and Lincoln?

PL: Because there wasn't any work and we had outgrown the school, and there were five of us altogether. Daddy had to do something because he worked on a farm, and there wasn't anywhere for us to find jobs. I picked beans, potatoes, what have you, for a time—but as far as finding a job for more than a quarter— And mother was working for fifty cents, maybe an hour, or a dollar something like that, and we had to do something. So, they told daddy they were hiring in Fayetteville, and I think Oklahoma Tire and Supply was the first job Dad had. Then he went from there over to the Goff Lincoln and Mercury Company, and he worked there the rest of his forty-two years. That's the reason, because there was not any work. Everybody who lived around there worked for somebody that had a farm or a canning plant or something like that.

AB: I was going to ask you a couple of questions about coming down to Fort Smith for school. Did Preston come down as well to Fort Smith? (No) Do you remember how many people from Fayetteville came down?

PL: At times there were at least ten of us, and maybe more. The boys stayed with one lady and the girls stayed with somebody else. When I came, there were six of us with this lady, and then when my aunt was here, I believe there were, about five girls and maybe four or five boys..

AB: And how did you get down and back?

PL: We had to ride the bus down. If we had money, we could go back home. We had to pay our own way back and forth, but the Fayetteville school system paid for the room and board, and the people we stayed with provided room and food.

AB: So you could go home on a weekend if you had the money?

PL: If you had the money or if somebody had a car.

AB: How often did you get to come home?

PL: Oh, maybe about every six weeks to two months. Sometimes somebody would come down, pick us up, and take us home or we'd get a ride back with somebody else. But we didn't go back very often.

AB: Do you remember how big the school was?

PL: Lincoln [in Fort Smith], it was a big school. They've torn it down now. It was two-story.

AB: Do you remember how you found out that the schools were going to desegregate?

PL: From the newspaper and some of the people told us, "The kids from Fayetteville can go back home because they're not going to pay." So when they did that, I thought "Boo hidey, I'm going back home." But that's the way it started. It was in the paper; it was on the radio. And, as I say, the families found out, I guess, where they worked or what have you, that their

children could go to school right there in Fayetteville. They didn't have to leave home and come way down here.

AB: And you really wanted to go home to go to school, but you said your parents were a little unsure?

PL: Yeah, yeah. Mother said, "Oh, I don't know." Well, see they weren't going to pay, and Mother couldn't afford to keep me down here. Tuition and room and board, they couldn't do it, and buy books. And I told her, "I'll be just fine." And I didn't have any problems. I walked all over Fayetteville to work. I never did learn how to drive. I had an eye problem, still have, and I still don't drive. My husband drives. I walked just about everywhere I worked, and I didn't have any problems with anybody.

AB: And were your parents nervous that something would go wrong or that there would be some problems at school?

PL: I don't know whether Mother was nervous or whether she just didn't know what the situation was, because I don't know that anybody told them that something could happen to us or what have you. I just don't think, you know, they really read the paper and found out exactly what it was all about because they just listened to what somebody told them. Because my mom and dad, I don't think, went any further than fourth or fifth grade. So some things, you know, they didn't try and read, they just let somebody tell them. I don't know because, see my dad, now, he knew all about that going to the back door to get you something to eat or something like that in his time, growing up. So I don't know whether he had any problem as a young man or not. He came out of [?] Springs and my mother came out of Hogeye, so as I say, I'm not sure. They didn't talk about their childhood a whole lot. Dad didn't, he didn't talk about his at all, but mother— they didn't seem to have much of a problem. They seemed like they enjoyed life.

AB: Did you talk to Preston or some of the other kids that would go with you to school, did you talk to them about it during the summer? Was everybody else excited about going?

PL: I think we were all excited; we had decided to all get together and go to school. That was just it. Preston's dad probably took him, because he was crippled a little bit, so he couldn't walk the distance I walked from my house to the high school. We just met up and then at lunch time, if we all had lunch at the same time, we would all get together and, "Well, we're here, we're here." That's all there was to it, and it just got to be like we'd been going all along.

AB: I've read that during the summer before you went to Fayetteville High School, some of the kids, the white children, from the churches, would meet with you guys. Do you ever remember anything like that?

PL: I don't. That could have happened, because I worked after school, and during the summer, I went with families on vacations to take care of the children. So it's a possibility that they could have. When we had Bible school, we had three white missionaries, Reverend and Mrs. Reed and another lady, I can't think of her name. They would have Bible school, and one or two of the white children would come and we'd have a good time. But I don't remember really talking to anybody about it myself because I had just made up my mind. I was not coming back down here [Fort Smith] to school, I was going to stay. Virginia and them could have because they were younger than I am, but I don't remember that part.

AB: I guess you were gone during the summer, so you wouldn't have gone to anything like orientation at the school or anything like that?

PL: No, I was trying to remember, I don't believe they had orientation. If they did, we didn't know anything about it. We got all of our information when we registered for classes and

the homeroom teacher explained what we could do and what we couldn't do. If we needed help, somebody was there. And then the next year, we had orientation, to figure out what we wanted to take and what we wanted to do. But now, the first year, I don't remember any of that.

AB: Now, I'm trying to figure out for sure who all went. There were the three Lackeys—Preston and Roberta and Elnora.

PL: Seems like there was Roberta, Elnora, Preston, Virginia Lee.

AB: And Mary Mae Blackburn?

PL: Yes, Mary Mae.

AB: And you said you didn't feel like you were doing something historic or anything real big, didn't think you would be interviewed fifty years later?

PL: I never dreamed I was making history. I never did. And when they did this [newspaper article] for the forty-five class reunion, I thought, "Are you serious? It was more than me. What's the deal?" Because I really didn't know how to go about it. I was so nervous and tense, I didn't know what to do, and they said, "No, we're going to interview you. And I said, "For what?! I didn't do anything." And then, after that, I thought, "I made history, I must have been sleeping, I must have slept all the way through it because I don't even remember it. But anyway, it was a good feeling to know that I was one of the first blacks in the South. And we did not have a lot of problems, we did not have anybody hurt, no hurt feelings. As far as I know, now something could have gone on since then, but we didn't have a bit of a problem. As I say, really, that took more out of me to be interviewed than the whole two years I was in high school, because I just didn't realize all of this was history. But anyway, we got that done, so we've got the scholarship, I've got to get involved in that. [The Taylor Lackey fund is a scholarship named in honor of Peggy Taylor

and Preston Lackey and awarded to a Fayetteville High School graduating senior.]

AB: So at the time, you didn't even know you were one of the first blacks to go to school.

PL: No, we just thought they weren't going to pay, so they had to put us in a school somewhere, so we could go to school. It's true.

AB: You and Preston must have been one of the first, if not the first blacks to graduate from the white school?

PL. We were! Right, in the South. Yeah! Well, we didn't know it, we thought we were doing what we were supposed to be doing, go to school and graduate. When I look back on it now, it makes me feel good. Now my children all went to integrated schools and my kids all had good memories of their schools.

AB: When you went to the high school, did you feel like you were prepared academically or did you feel like the classes were hard. How'd you do in school?

PL: Oh, the first six weeks was kind of rough because you had to learn to study for yourself, be independent. And I'd work and it would be 5:30, 6:00 before I got back home, and I would be so tired, but I had to find time to study. So I had to work the first six weeks to get into a routine. I guess when I first started out, I might have had a C average, and then after I learned and taught myself that I had to study, that there was nobody that was going to help me. I think I got about a B, B plus.

AB: So when you were down in Fort Smith and at Lincoln in Fayetteville before that, you just didn't have to study as much, it was easier?

PL: It was easier. See, we were a small group, there might just be eight or ten of us in a class and the teacher could take us aside and she would help us or we would help each other, and in [Fayetteville] high school, you had to have it by the time you

came back the next morning. So you had to learn to study on your own. So it was a challenge to me but I worked at it.

AB: Was it rare that you had a job after school or did a lot of your friends have jobs after school?

PL: A lot of my friends had jobs because Mother and Daddy and the others had these little bitty jobs paying nothing. And we would be the babysitting; mine was ironing. The first job I had was ironing for fifty cents an hour and it was all white shirts.

AB: And [your employers were] white families?

PL: (Nods)

AB: And when you got the money did you just keep it and use it yourself or did you give it to your parents to help out around the house, or what?

PL: Mostly to myself because there were things I needed for school, clothing and things like that. Daddy kept the house pretty well and in food and stuff. I needed some different clothes because I come from a line where they made everything you wore. And I tell you, I just couldn't stand that stuff today. I needed things, because when we went to go to school with them, we had to do better in dressing. Because we just didn't have it at first; we were all the same boat about it. You know, it was a black school, so we just didn't think about it, but before we got over there, we had to do a little better with our dress code.

AB: Do you remember if you went to football games or basketball games or things like that?

PL: We went to football games because Preston was the main one to learn to drive, and he would carry us. And we'd all load up and go to the ball game. And then I think he and I went to one sock hop at the high school. Of course, he didn't dance, and I didn't dance, we just went and mingled around with the rest of the kids. We didn't miss too many things if Preston was able to go.

AB: I read about Bull Hayes, who was two years younger than you, I guess, because he played football...

PL: Yes, he was the first. The year when I was a senior, I really did not get to interact with the freshmen that came in. I knew of them, but as far as spending time or trying to tell them what was going on, I didn't. But I knew him because his sister and I were good friends. I could see her house from my back yard, so we were close friends. And Joe Manuel, I think, played football, and Wayne didn't do anything, I think. But anyway, Bull Hayes was the main one that was the star of the football part. I played volleyball. That was what I liked a little bit. We had a team. I don't think we competed with other schools; I think it was just within the school and home rooms, I think that's the way it went. And we'd have contests.

AB: The three Lackeys were obviously from the same family. Were you related to them at all?

PL: Distant cousin. Distant. Now the Lackeys and Virginia, their Daddy and Virginia's mother were brother and sister, that's the way it went. So I'm distant kin on my dad's side somewhere, but don't ask me to go down that tree because I cannot.

AB: The elementary schools didn't integrate until 1965, so you wouldn't have known about the elementary schools?

PL: (Shakes her head no)

AB: Why do you think it went so well in Fayetteville, why do you think it was so easy?

PL: I don't know whether to say we were all asleep and when we woke up it had happened and there it was and we just accepted it and went on. I don't know; I really don't know what to say, the reason why it happened so peacefully. At the forty-five years reunion, they didn't realize it either, so it was just like we were all asleep and when we woke up, we had made history. I'm going to tell you, that's just about it. I don't know

what the young folks would say after fifty-six, I don't know whether we would say we were more family oriented then and group minded. The family went to church together, they were at home together, they did things together. It was just a different quality of people I believe. That's a hard question, I have never really thought about it. We went to school two years and nobody said a thing. It was [a good thing] I don't have any bad feelings. I'm just so happy that I was a part of it, and never dreamed I was making history. It was good for me because I got to see and do things that I probably never would have done in an all-black school.

Nancy (Cole) Mays was a high school junior when Fayetteville High School integrated in 1954. In 1956, she graduated with perhaps the first integrated class in the former Confederacy. She has since taken a leading role in maintaining communication between members of that class and in publicly recognizing the significance of Fayetteville's achievement. She currently lives in Fayetteville with her husband.

AB: Before they integrated the high school, what was the racial attitude around town, was there any discrimination?
NM: Oh yes, there was discrimination. There were so few blacks, we called them coloreds at that time, that lived here that until they started going to school with us, I think that it was very easy to pretend they didn't live here. There were four theaters—one was on the south side, the Royal. I never went there because "nice" people didn't go there. The blacks could go there. Then there was the Palace on the east side of the square, and the blacks could sit in the balcony. They couldn't go to the Ozark or the UARK. Blacks never went in restaurants. The University allowed blacks to go to summer school. I know this because (now this is after the high school integration; I'm

sure it happened before, but I just know about it after) I worked in the registrar's office during the summer, and we had a letter that said we see that you graduated from Louisiana or whatever and therefore you are probably not a resident of this state and you attended an all-colored, an all-black school, and only black students from Arkansas are allowed to come to the University. Which was certainly discriminatory. We had such a small community of blacks and they weren't like the blacks that you find here now who are educated and probably associated with the University. There were a few blacks in Fayetteville, but even when I was in high school, this was the poorest part of the state. Fayetteville was always wanting to be the educational center and didn't want any industry. Springdale didn't allow blacks, so there was no reason for blacks to move into the area.

AB: Before the schools integrated, there was Lincoln School, which was the black school. How much did you know about that school?

NM: You knew it was the black school and where it was, and that was it.

AB: So you really had no contact with them.

NM: Peggy Taylor worked for my friend Joy Stewart's mother in the afternoon, so I actually knew Peggy before she was in my class. We had two, Preston and Peggy.

AB: Do you remember how you found out that the schools were going to integrate?

NM: The paper. I can still remember the day the Supreme Court decision came down, but I think Fayetteville would have integrated anyway, which you've probably heard, as they couldn't afford to pay for the kids to go to Fort Smith. It would be nice if there was some wonderful, benevolent, loving reason, but it was financial. One separate thing, there was such strong support that the adults didn't get involved. They let the kids handle it.

AB: As best as you can remember, what was the general attitude of the students toward integration?

NM: Very supportive. I've heard some of the boys say that there were some incidents. I guess a couple of the boys made remarks to somebody, maybe in gym or something, but several others stood up for whoever that happened to be. So it was very good. It wasn't until we all got together for our twentieth reunion of high school that we realized we had done something special. We never made the newspapers, but they did say there was a picture—Carol Turner was walking some people to class—that did hit the wire services. I'm digressing a little, but an interesting thing, when I went to California my experience was that everyone thought I was from Little Rock and they assumed I was a racist. They made the headlines everywhere forever and nobody even knew about us. And I think Pastor Andrew Hall of Fayetteville's First Baptist Church had a positive influence on what went on. One of the things I'm wondering if you've heard because I have run into people that didn't remember this. When we were in our second year and the boys were eligible to play sports, some teams said they wouldn't play us. Of course you probably already know this. So they let us vote, and I realize now it was probably a straw vote. They weren't letting us have the authority, but they probably just wanted to see. Maybe in my mind then, I thought we were making that decision, but it was probably just information for the school board. I mean the school board obviously had to make that decision, but it helped them to know that the students were behind it, that we wouldn't feel cheated.

AB: You said you didn't really know about it, so you probably didn't have a sense that you were doing something historic at the time?

NM: I mean I knew about it, but I wasn't involved in setting the tone. There was an understanding that we all felt this was the

right thing to do. Mrs. Bell let us know that we jolly well better behave, and then because parents didn't get involved, I never remember any incident. It may have happened, but I don't remember any kind of incident that got Mrs. Bell thinking maybe this shouldn't happen. And I read the paper. I don't know if I read the letters to the editor. I never got the sense that anybody thought that this shouldn't happen.

AB: So you think it was really important that the parents didn't get involved?

NM: I often think about this now when I hear about uproars, about kids having problems and parents fighting back for whatever issue the issue is. I think in this way the kids are usually more open to change. We didn't have the prejudices.

AB: So you never came into contact with specific incidents or problems within the school, you just heard about a couple?

NM: No. Now I want to tell you that between classes, the blacks went in their groups and we went in ours. But then there were lots of groups of whites that I didn't go into, so I didn't think too much of that. Now my grandfather, who I don't really think was prejudiced, thought they would have black classes. He wasn't saying it in a critical way, it was just a whole different way of living than he had been used to.

AB: So, how much interaction did you have with individual blacks?

NM: Primarily in class, or when I'd take Peggy home from Joy's, and that was primarily it. They must have felt somewhat welcome because they did come—both Peggy and Preston—to our fortieth reunion. Donna van Hoose, whose brother is mayor of Springdale (they were both in our class, Jerry and Donna), went to Preston's funeral and Preston's sister told her how afraid they were, which really shocked me because that hadn't even occurred to me, that they would feel afraid, because I never felt that anybody would threaten them, but they were

definitely in the minority. It was the whole reason we integrated to begin with because there weren't enough of them to have a school. It has to be frightening, but, you know, I was sixteen.

AB: So the black students were essentially their own group of friends, not because anybody made them, but just because that's who they knew?

NM: Yes, just like the rest of us. Now I think probably when the boys got on the team in our senior year, that they probably did interact more with the fellas on the team. Of course, the girls didn't do that, but we interacted in class and that was pretty much it. But that's what I did with the majority of people.

I came from a class that was so strong, they were really leaders. I think I had to leave here to find out that I was any more than just an average person. Mrs. Bell retired to take care of her mother. I thought she was ancient, but she was probably about as old as I am. She said this was the best class she had ever had, that she thought she'd leave while she was ahead, and I really do believe that.

AB: You mentioned Louise Bell. Do you remember any other individuals who played a really big role in making integration work?

NM: I think Harry Vandergriff did from what I've read. He was the football coach, and I think he had a lot of influence on the males, but about the whole faculty, I don't ever remember anything but positive.

AB: Now the second year was when Bull Hayes started playing football. Do you remember anything in particular about that or what impact that had on the school?

NM: Well that was when the other teams wouldn't play us. The student body standing up and saying that they should be on the team made us realize some things that were happening at the school.

AB: In retrospect, is there anything you wish you had or hadn't done?
NM: No, I think if you set it back in that time, I think we were all welcoming, and I think that was the main thing at that point that needed to be done. And maybe the low key made it work. I guess we tried on both sides. The blacks probably tried to be as unobtrusive as possible and just not be noticed. And we tried to be as welcoming as we knew how, but I think we pretty much did without anybody telling us—they were probably subtly telling us, but they were not telling us, commanding us—to be nice to these people. Although I understand that Mrs. Bell told some people, I think they were fellas.
AB: Preston and Peggy both graduated with your class—is that right?
NM: Yes.

Feriba T. McNair began teaching in Fayetteville in 1943 and has been active in the Fayetteville Public Schools for the past sixty years. In 1954 she was a physical education teacher and thus observed integration from the faculty's perspective. In recognition of her service on the faculty, school board, and public education foundation, the Fayetteville School Board named McNair Middle School in her honor. Mrs. McNair currently resides in Fayetteville.

AB: When did you come to Fayetteville?
FM: In 1935. I taught school from forty-three to forty-six at Fayetteville, and then I stopped for a period of time and then I went back in fifty-three.
AB: Why did you stop?
FM: Well, because I had a family, and I became the community volunteer of that day.

AB: Now back then [early 1950s, the time of integration], when the town was about 15-18,000 people, how much discrimination was there, what was the general attitude between the races?

FM: Well, I just didn't have that much to do with black people. However, I will say it was unusual for my children to associate with them, but they did. Black children were active in all the baseball leagues and things like that. And when the Youth Center had a camp, there were black kids, a whole bunch of them.

AB: And it just wasn't a big deal up here in Northwest Arkansas?

FM: No, I remember, that's the first association I remember, with my oldest son.

AB: And when did your sons graduate from high school?

FM: Sixty-six and sixty-eight.

AB: And I read that around the time of integration, the new high school opened, do you remember when that was?

FM: I think it was 1953.

AB: Now, I've read that there wasn't much newspaper coverage or much press. Do you remember any newspapers or photographers that were at the school during the first couple of days following integration?

FM: I remember when the principal, Louise Bell, set it up, it was really more or less kept out of the papers.

AB: On purpose they kept it out of the press?

FM: Yes, you need to read Louise Bell's chapter in *Civil Obedience*, because she was the principal then, and she and Virgil Blossom had worked all summer with groups in the high school like the Twenty-Six Club and and the sophomore guides, and with the students that were coming into the high school, and so they were integrated, they and their families, during the summer. And they worked out courses for the kids in advance and tried to get them acclimated to the new setting and what

was going to happen. But as far as the press was concerned, Louise Bell talked about the *New York Times* calling and wanting to come down and get information so they could write an article about all the uproar down here and she said, "We don't have any uproar." So the man quickly hung up; he wasn't interested in talking to her anymore. But they didn't give it to the press until Mrs. Bell called and finally granted an interview. I remember standing there with all the new students on the steps. It was short, concise, but she let them interview the black people.

AB: I haven't found that in any of the papers I've looked at, but if it happened a week or so after school started, I would have missed it, because I only looked at the first few days.

FM: I believe it's Preston [Lackey] that talks about it, about how they came in a group the first day and how there was some anxiety because of things that they had heard, but nothing took place and they just went to class. He does tell one little incident —he got in the wrong seat and somebody said to him "Sambo," called him Sambo, but not the "N" word or anything like that, as far as I know. And I was there, I was on the committee when they had to play in the conference with the blacks—the committee that discussed that. I was the faculty representative on that, with the school board and the students and the coaches.

AB: To decide whether or not you would play the other schools when that happened?

FM: Yes, that was a year or so later, though.

AB: From what I've read I think Superintendent Virgil Blossom left in the middle of the 53-54 year, and then Wayne White was there.

FM: January, I think.

AB: Now, I've read that there were six black students and that there were seven, do you remember?

FM: The seventh came later. He came from California.

AB: Was that Preston?
FM: No, Preston, was there from the beginning.
AB: And since most of them were sophomores, they would have been at Lincoln the year before, but the older two would have attended school in Fort Smith or Hot Springs?
FM: Yes, they speak of Hot Springs and Fort Smith.
AB: And the school board paid for them to go down there. Now there were the three Lackeys, and then Peggy Taylor, Virginia Smith, and Mary Mae Blackburn. How much did the six or seven black students keep to themselves? Do you remember if they got along real well with the white students and mixed with them, or did they kind of keep to themselves?
FM: Well, we had homerooms. They were not all in the same homeroom, so they were forced to associate with the others. We developed an intramural program later that really, really integrated the kids. They had already integrated pep rallies, and each homeroom unit put on a skit. And I always remember that Peggy had a beautiful voice and she just brought the house down with her voice and with her skit, so you see there were all kinds of all ways that they integrated. They did walk down the hall together, stayed together when they changed into their gym clothes, and they chose a couple of showers next to one another. They were a little group within the group when they were in gym class. So there was some natural grouping.
AB: I read that some of the white students would try to avoid the showers that the blacks were in. Was that the most racism, whatever you want to call it, that you saw?
FM: I don't think it was racism, and I think that's a little normal anyway, because girls, you know how clannish girls are, much more clannish than boys in my opinion—I don't really think that that was that abnormal, there were a whole bunch of showers.
AB: And they didn't really make a big deal out of it?

FM: No, no, nobody ever said it. I just barely caught onto the fact, as I checked on my board who went into the showers and who didn't.

AB: Do you remember how well the black students did at school academically?

FM: I think some of them (remember that they had selected their courses), as far as the work, there was some difference. There was some difference in the way they wrote and expressed themselves. But now, the three Lackeys, they wanted an education. They moved here from out around Lincoln or Prairie Grove for a better education, and I don't know where Peggy came from. I think the others were born here, had been here for a generation or so.

AB: And I read that Preston was elected to student council, and Peggy was cheerleader from her homeroom so it seems like the white students must have accepted them like anybody else.

FM: Yes, I think they did. I didn't have as much association with Preston because I taught six PE classes and one science class, and I didn't have him in science.

AB: Do you remember what the teachers' general reaction to integration was, what the teachers knew about it beforehand, just if they thought anything strange about it?

FM: Well, I don't remember anybody making any fuss. Actually, the board of education had recognized that this was coming, and they didn't try to fight it, they just tried to get ready for it. And I think that moving into the high school and planning for numbers and so forth, that they had all of those things in mind. And there really wasn't very much objection to it that I could see, and those teachers I taught with for years, some of them had taught me. There was a club called the Twenty-Six Club that they used it in a positive way for new student orientation—not black, not white, it just wasn't spoken of in those times. And it made all the difference in the world.

There was never any question about "are we or aren't we?" It was a done deal when it was explained to people, and I think it was a little bit shocking to people, but people had accepted blacks on the university level. There was little bit of background here at the law school. And I guess it was that as far as integration was concerned got a little more publicity in the community than the integration of the high school.

AB: I was really surprised with how little publicity there was; even in the *Northwest Arkansas Times* there was hardly anything.

FM: We didn't give it to them, we controlled things. Louise Bell says that the school board controlled things.

AB: From what you said, the teachers just went about their business and didn't think anything of it, and so they must have treated the black students just as fairly and the same as anybody else.

FM: I think so, we all did. And I was always looking for someone to say that they had been discriminated against, but I never heard that.

AB: Did you or did the teachers have a sense that you were doing something really historic, that you were involved in something that had never happened before?

FM: When I was inducted into the Hall of Honor, I had to get a resume together of what I've done and I made a real point of not listing participating in that because I felt that it was a natural event that should have taken place, and I think maybe it evolved because of the times and the law and money and a whole lot of things, but it was well done, well accepted. I consider it just what happened that year. To me, that is nothing to be complimented for or nothing to be recognized for.

AB: Did elementary schools go just as easily as the high school did?

FM: Just business as usual. That's the best that I can see. I don't think that you could, though you might be able to find something there, but it wouldn't come from me because as I say it was already a done deal, and I don't remember any trouble that the board dealt with or anything.

AB: Well, I think that's all the questions I had, unless there was anything you wanted to add?

FM: I'm trying to think. Maybe somebody else has something, but I was on the topside. I had no negative experience. We had a good time with all the black girls. We played basketball, mostly, I think because it was open to everybody. And everybody participated in helping the new students. There was a protective feeling as far as they were concerned rather than a hostile feeling. Now there were a few smart alecks, but they were pretty well monitored. Louise Bell ran a real tight ship, she was a disciplinarian. I had a lot of respect for her.

LEWIS EVANS: WASHINGTON COUNTY PIONEER

BOB KEEN

In this article we will try to follow the footsteps of Lewis Evans from his arrival in Washington County, Arkansas, through the California gold fields and back. Lewis's past was about as unknown as his later life. We know from the 1850 census of Washington County that he was born in 1799 in North Carolina. According to family tradition he migrated as a fifteen-year-old lad to Oklahoma Territory with Captain William Lovely. The earliest evidence we have of his presence in Washington County is a letter from him that is in the possession of one of his descendants. He sent the letter from Tolu, Indian Territory, in 1827, where he operated a trading post and mill on Evansville Creek. This area became a part of Arkansas in the treaty of 1828. The name of the town changed to Vineyard, then to Wilsonville, then to Greersburg. It was said that Evans furnished meal and flour for most of Washington County. Tolu was located about a half mile west of the Vineyard Cemetery, a mile and a half north of the present town of Evansville, Arkansas. In 1836 Governor Conway renamed the town Evansville in honor of Lewis Evans.

In 1828 a post office was established in Vineyard according to the territories of the United States with Lewis Evans as the first postmaster. Jacob Chandler put up a three-hundred-dollar bond for him to be postmaster. In 1827 Lewis was elected the first sheriff of Washington County. He served in that office until 1836. In 1829 he took the first census of Washington County, which became known as the sheriff's census. In October 1828 a grand

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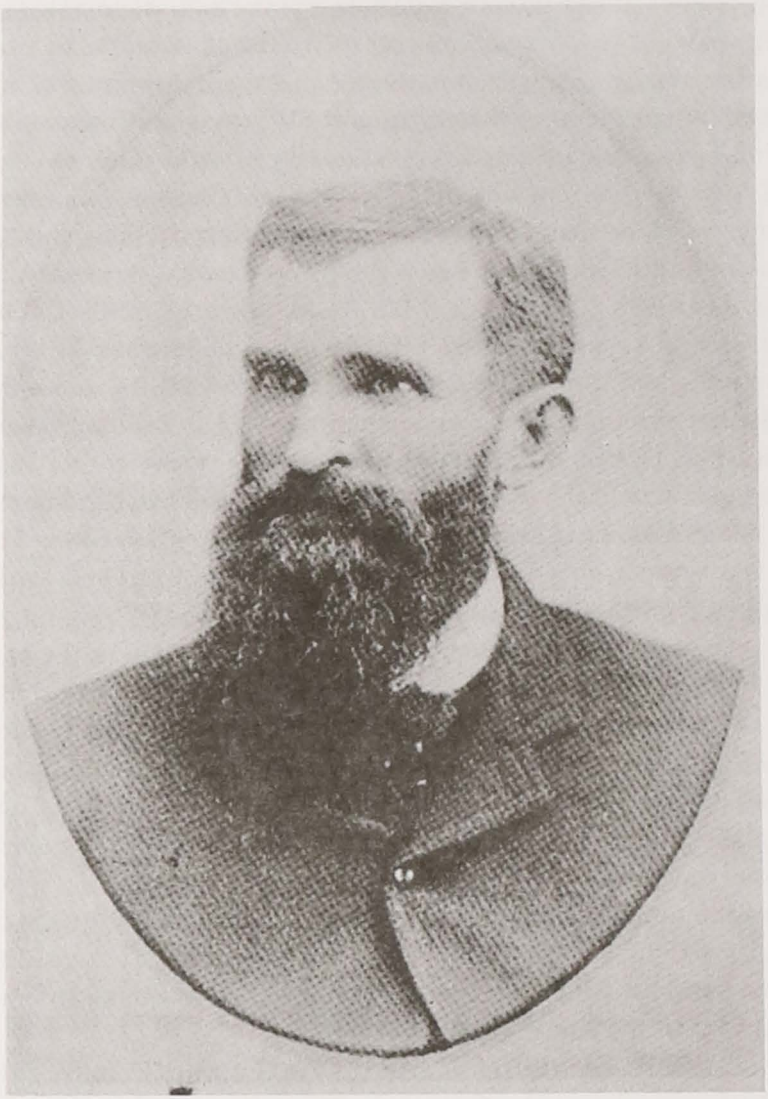
Bob Keen lives in Lincoln and has an enduring interest in the history of this area of Washington County.

jury was convened in Washington County and a committee convened to locate a site for the county seat. The five commissioners were Lewis Evans, John Woody, William Woody, Larkin Newton, and Samuel Vaughan. The site was found and a name was needed. Since two of the members of the commission came from Fayetteville, Tennessee, the name of Fayetteville was chosen. The United States Government gave a patent for the land, the deed for which lists the United States as the grantor and Lewis Evans as the grantee. Lewis Evans was involved in most of the early land records of Washington County and some three hundred deeds of the early county history list him as the grantor, including those for such famous people as Archibald Yell, David Walker, and Isaac Murphy. Lewis was also on the board of directors of the Cane Hill College, and one of the early presidents of the American Bible Society.

Evans married Elisa (?) sometime in the 1820s; they had five sons and a daughter, all born near Evansville. They were Mark Bean, Albert Pike, Dewitt Clinton, Mary, Henry Clay, and Lewis Walker, who was named for Judge David Walker.

Very little has been written in Washington County about Lewis Evans; however, for all he did for Washington County, we could almost call him the father of Washington County. Evans spent most of his time in Arkansas around the Evansville area, where he owned two hundred acres and seven slaves; still, his duties as sheriff necessitated many trips to Fayetteville. In 1838 a flood of merchants came to Evansville to sell their goods to the Cherokees, but as government payments were delayed for fifteen years, these merchants failed. Lewis Evans bought up some of their property, built a large general store, and established a tanning yard on the site of present-day Evansville. When Fayetteville was plotted out, he bought two lots in the county seat: Block 17 and lot 5 for thirty-five dollars, and Block 13, lot 5, for ten dollars.



Lewis Walker Evans, born in Evansville in 1843 and named for David Walker (courtesy Bob Keen).

Lewis Evans's major endeavor was in 1849, when gold fever hit the county. A company of men met to arrange to go to California. Lewis Evans was elected captain of this group of men. There were several well-known men of Washington County in this group, including Peter Mankins and Isaac Murphy (later governor of Arkansas). Grant Foreman relates that "Captain L. Evans of Fayetteville, Arkansas, headed a party of forty wagons and one-hundred-thirty persons from Washington County, Arkansas, and the Cherokee Nation, April 20, 1849" ("Early Trails through Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*). Some struck gold and some did not. Books written in later years call the route they traveled the Cherokee Trail, but in most early accounts it was known as Captain Evans Trail. A fascinating story is told in the Foreman article about a Cherokee man who traveled the same trail in 1850. Where the Santa Fe Trail crosses the Captain Evans Trail in Okalahoma, he noticed a large stone that read "To Fayetteville, Ark. 300 miles-Capt. Evans'Com'y, May 12, 1849."

Captain Evans returned to Arkansas sometime in the early 1850s, sold all his belongings, and moved to Gonzales County, Texas, where he acquired fourteen hundred acres, and his sons made the cattle drives to Kansas. Albert established a commission company in East St. Louis, Illinois. His younger brother Lewis Walker Evans was a rancher and cattle baron in Comanche County, Kansas, and also an agent for the commission company. He sold out his entire holdings in Kansas the year before the big snow of 1886. Lewis Walker's son Jesse was known as one of the most expert cowboys in Kansas, widely hailed by most cattlemen as a hero of the Kansas cattle business.

Captain Lewis Evans died in 1880 in Gonzales County. There is no date or place of burial known. The author of *Cherokee Trail* states that he found his grave in the Masonic Cemetery in Gonzales County, but according to the historical society of Gonzales County, there is no marker in that cemetery for Lewis

Evans. Lewis Evans's probate is recorded in Gonzales County, 21st day of May 1882, with all his children listed as heirs. Louis Walker Evans Jr.'s children were Lewis P., Fred, Corrine, Jesse, and Bessie. Fred Evans's son is Steve Evans; Steve Evans is the head of the border patrol under Homeland Security in Washington, D.C. as of 2003.

Resources

History of Washington County
Chronicles of Oklahoma
Historical Society of Gonzales County, Texas
Goodspeed's History
One Hundred Years of Fayetteville by William S. Campbell
United States Territorial Records
1850 census of Washington County, Arkansas
Historical Society of Caldwell, Kansas
Washington County land archives

SYCAMORE SPRINGS MISCELLANY

DENELE PITTS CAMPBELL

A leather-bound journal found at a garage sale had been converted from its original use as a church record book into a scrapbook filled mostly with newspaper clippings pasted solid across each page. Dark blue imprinted numbers in the upper right hand corner of each page end at number 88, although a few more leaves may have been torn out. Only pages 68–87 remain as originally inscribed, all but two signed by Nora B. Mount, Secretary. One page is signed by Pearl Palmer. Page 58, only partly covered with clippings, is signed by P. B. Cowgill and dated November 24, 1895.

These are the records of a Sycamore Springs congregation, the earliest name of a settlement which later became Wheeler, in northwest Washington County. An excellent discussion of the founding of Sycamore Springs just after the Civil War by Jacob Litteral, its name change to Litteral, and later evolution to become Wheeler is found in the February 1984 *Flashback*. A photograph of members of Sycamore Springs School dated 1891–1892 is found in the August 1988 *Flashback*, showing Nora Mount and a few others mentioned in the recently discovered journal. Another *Flashback* article, "Shady Grove Baptist Church of Christ," (March 1958) mentions the "dismission for the purpose of organizing a Baptist Church at Sycamore Springs," for several people, dated September 1887.

The visible pages of the journal begin with the church record of May 3, 1896, and end September 13, 1896. The earliest covered page that yields slightly to investigation beneath the pasted-on clippings is page 24, which shows the year 1894.

Carmyn Pitts of Fayetteville discovered the journal that contains the material in this article. She will donate it to the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History.

The record for May 3rd, 1896, reads as follows:
Sunday school was opened by singing no. 86 in the Class choir.
The lesson, Luke 17:5-19 was read in concert.
Prayer by the Superintendent.
Lesson subject: Faith
Golden-text, Lord, increase my faith.

No. of officers present		2
"	teachers "	3
"	scholars "	38
"	visitors "	1
	Total	42

Collection 2 cts
School closed after a very interesting lesson by singing.

Nora Mount,
Secretary

The next page, for services May 10, notes a collection of twenty-one cents. Each record follows this strict format, each page closing with the same statement about an "interesting lesson." The highest number of attendance was fifty-six, on which day the collection was zero. Twenty-one cents was the greatest collection. Average attendance for the twenty recorded pages was forty-one, with an average contribution of just over seven cents.

The final page includes a footnote as follows: "A. L. Mount, Perzy Cowgill, Mrs. Rollins, Nora Mount, Claud Blew were elected delegates to the Sunday school convention to be held at Walnut Grove."

The clippings which were well-pasted onto the journal sheets include a few images of the times. One shows three young plump-cheeked ladies at five o'clock tea sitting at a table laden

with cakes and fruit. Another shows an older man in overalls asleep leaning against a tree, his pitchfork and straw hat nearby, while a young man tickles his balding head with a wheat stem. In the background, the ox waits in the field. Another finds a young chap holding a bucket for a calf to feed, while another shows a young man leaning against pen wire to view a sow contentedly lying on her side to feed eleven piglets, captioned "Mealtime." One full page image shows two young ladies at a picnic, pointing in horror at a caterpillar crawling across their white cloth. Other images are also rural or agricultural. The last image has been cut into the shape of a heart, and shows a woman with upswept hair holding a young girl, perhaps age three, close to her face.

The clippings themselves cover a broad range of subjects, some of them seasonal, celebrating Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. One announces the establishment of Mother's Day. Others are by favored writers of the day, mostly Edgar A. Guest. One column, "Sandy Claws," was copyrighted in 1902 by W. H. Gannett, Publisher. Subjects addressed in the clippings, many of them poems, range from "Worry Is Fatal to Good Looks," "For the Bride of '96," "Nobody Knows But Mother," to "A Plea for Eggs," by A. Cowles, credited to the *Hartford Times*.

Be gentle to the new-laid egg,
    for eggs are brittle things;
They cannot fly until they're hatched,
    And have a pair of wings
If once you break the tender shell,
    The wrong you can't redress;
The yolk and white will all run out,
    And make a dreadful mess.

'Tis but a little while at best
    That hens have power to lay;

To-morrow eggs may addled be,
Although quite fresh to-day.
So let the touch be very light
That takes it from the keg;
There is no hand whose cunning skill
Can mend a broken egg.

Peculiar selections include "A Courtship in Music—How the tenor wooed and won the soprano without saying a word." Staff lines showing musical notation are included. Others list the human bones, the size of lakes, and nonsense verse, this one probably a school fight song:

Strawberry shortcake huckleberry pie
We will beat them or we'll die
Bingo trojan microbe jaw
Mollycoddle caterpillar rah! rah! rah!

Local items include a poem entitled "Washington County" by R. L. S., while several later clippings, most of them loose within the pages, celebrate Arkansas, "The Wonder State." Lists of facts about the state note that "College crews place their hope of victory on Arkansas manufactured oars. The United States and English navies are heavy purchasers of Arkansas oars. The two largest boat oar factories in the United States are located in Arkansas–DeVall's Bluff and Des Arc," and "Arkansas produced the largest nugget of lead ever mined. It weighed 2,400 pounds and was mined in Marion county." The dates of most of the Arkansas-focused clippings suggest publication after 1920.

A few loose clippings are even later, such as a February 26 (no year shown) *Northwest Arkansas Times* article by M. C. Blackman entitled "'Inky' Blackman Visits New York and Hears What the Big World Thinks of the State of Arkansas." The article refers to Senator Joe T. Robinson (1872–1937) and Bob

Burns, and laments the fact that "Arkansas has built a wall around itself." A *Southwest Times Record* clipping from 1936 includes a visual record of "This Day in Arkansas History" featuring January 23, 1923, by W. J. Lemke.

Several obituary and other personal clippings are included in the early pages of the scrapbook. One is about Jonathan Clark, age 82, who died of pneumonia February 1, 1896, in the home of J. W. Mount. Another announces the death of Miss Alice Rhodes, daughter of R. A. and Elizabeth Rhodes, who died of consumption March 20, 1896.

Wedding announcements include Miss Beulah Moore to Mr. Mount at Siloam Springs February 20, 1902, and Miss Lila Mount to Mr. Nolan Moore, who, according to the brief article, "wore the usual dress suit and the air of a conqueror." Other names mentioned in wedding announcements were Rev. Edward Freyschlag and Miss Ida Appleby, Mr. Thos. Tabley and Miss Maggie Bonham, Mr. J. W. N. Allen and Miss Annie Ham, Fred L. Crawford and Miss Clara May Lyons, and Mr. Samuel R. Ahrens and Miss Cora Mayes.

A column including a photograph features J. M. Beard "Tyro" of Lowell, born January 18, 1851. Text describes various details of his life and states: "Marshall Beard is known as one of the best men in this section. He has filled a number of official positions in his community, and has been engaged in farming and various business enterprises. The News is proud to number as one of its correspondents a gentleman of his high character and standing."

A column on Sycamore Springs, no date, gives news of the community:

> The weather is hot and dry. Corn needs rain. The farmers are well up with their work and talking politics freely and good naturedly.

Uncle Ruben Bement and Ed Payton are still ahead of the hounds. They found bee tree.

Many of our people done the fourth at Springdale and pronounced it an eminent success as far as heat and dust and tameness was concerned.

Miss Abbie White, of Mo., is visiting her sister, Mrs. John Busey.

A tackey party was given in her honor by the young people on Thursday evening. There was a sound of revelry by night, for the chivalry of all Sycamore was there and all went merry as marriage bells. Those present were Miss Abbie White (the honored guest), Misses Demings, of Bentonville, Abbie Neal, Nora Mount, Ida Winters, Minnie Mount, Ida Busey, Lucy Busey, and Ethel Busey. Messers Ed Weir, Sam Ahrens, Ben Cowgill, Will Henshaw, Claud Blue, D. Neal, Joe Strain, Elbert Weir, Bob Page, Ed Page and Will Jack. Mr. and Mrs. Amos Mount and Mr. and Mrs. Steve Cowgill were judges to decide on costume and character. After much amusement and due deliberation they decided that Miss Abbie Neal as a country lass should have the cake and Mr. Ed Weir as country jake should have the candy. They each responded with short speeches and then shared their cake and candy with all. The evening was spent in amusing plays and charades in which all enjoyed themselves heartily. The best wishes of the party will go with Miss White when she returns home and we hope she may live long and make many such visits to Sycamore.

The local lodges of the 'Knights of the Horse' of Mt. Comfort and Double Springs will have a picnic the 18th on Hamestring's Creek near Dan Jacks. Come everyone and bring your baskets well filled.

Mr. Fred Ezell and lady are spending a few days at Eureka Springs. The Sunday School, with Bro. Haywood Thompson for Sup't., has been a live, wide-awake school all summer.

"A little nonsense now and then is relished by the best of men," but when the Democrats and Populists go CLEAN CRAZY is it our laugh.

P.

TRAGEDY IN TIN CUP

J. B. HOGAN

On an otherwise mostly quiet Saturday night, April 28, 1928, one of the most shocking killings in Fayetteville history took place. Just before eight o'clock that evening, two shots rang out in the traditionally black Tin Cup section on the city's east side. Then came a third shot.

When the air was still again, Fayetteville policeman Lem McPherson, forty-eight, lay dead on the ground. The killer: Everett "Eb" Williams, twenty-six, a local bootlegger recently released after a nine-month term in the Washington County jail.

Williams, who would elude final capture for the better part of a week, eventually was caught, arrested, tried and convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to twenty-one years in prison. But what caused the shooting between the two black men—one outside the law, the other sworn to uphold it?

Only six days before the shooting, Everett Williams had completed his sentence for the illegal transportation of alcohol, a common enough crime in those days of Prohibition, and had been set free. Post-incarceration life for Williams, however, was as unhappy as it was brief. He believed that while he was in jail his wife Henrietta had received the attentions of a number of other men, including Patrolman McPherson.

By the day of the shooting, Williams had become quite agitated over the matter and had spent Saturday afternoon, according to witnesses, drinking and "gunning" for McPherson. Williams's wife Henrietta had drunk so much alcohol herself that day that she was arrested and kept in jail the rest of the weekend.

Left by himself, Williams ended up walking north on Willow Street, where he encountered and continued strolling with a woman named Nellie Newton. While the two walked up the street,

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Williams and Patrolman McPherson had their first encounter of the day.

"I just hope he says something to me," Williams was reported to have told Newton as the lawman approached them.

Despite the soon-to-be killer's bravado, there was no real confrontation between the two antagonists at this time, most likely because Patrolman McPherson was carrying his police revolver at his side. The two men may have made their hostility to one another clear, but they went their separate ways for the time being.

As afternoon turned into evening, Williams—now an object of interest to Fayetteville Police, who had begun actively looking for him—went in search of a weapon. He found what he was looking for in the home of another local resident, Major Blackburn. Without Blackburn's knowledge Williams took the steady workingman's 12-gauge shotgun and headed towards Webb's, a popular restaurant on North Willow in Tin Cup.

"I ain't lookin' for y'all," Williams told brothers Sam and Embras Young as he passed Webb's.

The Youngs knew who the armed man was looking for, as they had spoken to Patrolman McPherson some time earlier when the officer told them he knew Williams was looking for him and that he, McPherson, had told the brothers: "I'll take care of him."

With Fayetteville Police in general, and Officer McPherson specifically, looking for Williams, and with the bootlegger looking to "come to a settlement" with McPherson while keeping himself out of sight from the law, it was just a matter of time before the fateful confrontation between the two men would take place. Finally, as it neared eight P.M., the men faced each other for the last time.

A few hundred yards from Webb's restaurant, near a ravine and a field with a small house in it, the bootlegger and the patrolman faced off. Sam and Embras Young were nearby, but when they saw the two men displaying guns, the brothers hustled away. Suddenly, two shots were heard almost simultaneously, with, as Embras Young stated emphatically in court, Williams firing first. Only seconds later, a third shot rang out.

"I've got you now," Williams was said to have cried out before running away into the darkening night. Two Fayetteville police officers, Lem Guinn and D. A. "Slim" Burson, were near Webb's when they heard the shots fired into the night. They unsuccessfully pursued Williams, firing their revolvers at the fleeing killer as he ran through Tin Cup towards the Baptist Church.

Back in the field where the shooting had taken place, Lem McPherson lay still in the grass and weeds. He had been hit by both of Williams' shotgun blasts, in the back and side of the head by one, "between the shoulders by the other." The patrolman left behind a wife, Willie, two sons, and a daughter. After two years of keeping order in Tin Cup, Lem McPherson was dead and his police revolver was missing.

With the killer still at large, Fayetteville Police mounted a full scale dragnet for Williams. Officers on foot combed the Tin Cup area while others cruised the narrow, hilly streets in police cars looking for the escaped shooter. They were looking in the wrong place.

Williams somehow managed to evade discovery and was reported to have been seen several times on the square not long after the killing. He calmly went into a hardware store and then boldly entered the Farmers Exchange around nine P.M., where witnesses said they saw him "carrying a revolver stuck in his left pocket."

Despite the sightings and the police search, Williams was on the loose for the rest of the weekend. He later testified that he spent Saturday night after the killing by Stone's Bridge near the White River out east of town, where he built a fire to keep himself warm.

The search continued without success all day Sunday. Only Major Blackburn's shotgun, the one used in the killing, was found leaning against a post on the path Blackburn always traveled to work. On Monday, however, there were signs that the police were onto their man.

Rumors flew that Williams had been seen in Tin Cup "fully armed" and "had been surrounded" at one point. It was also said he had actually been close enough to watch Patrolman McPherson's

funeral that afternoon in the "Colored" Cemetery on the south side of town. Finally, late Monday evening, the police got a tip that Williams was holed up in the basement of the Phi Mu sorority house on Dickson Street, where his sister worked as a cook.

Two unnamed policemen (most likely Guinn and Burson again), using a taxicab for a patrol wagon, captured Williams and brought him to jail. Unfortunately, the officers had not handcuffed Williams and allowed him to sit in the front of the cab by the driver while they sat in back. As the taxi came to a stop outside the jail at Mountain and College Streets, the front door jolted open and Williams rolled out of the vehicle and onto the street "unhampered" in any way.

"Don't shoot," the prisoner cried out as he backed away towards the corner of the jail building, "I'll give up."

Then, while the surprised officers were still off guard, Williams bolted around the side of the jail and was gone. The officers fired at him with their pistols but to no avail. Completing yet another daring escape, the killer was once more on the loose, having vanished as he did before into the dark of night.

With Williams free a second time, the manhunt resumed. This time Fayetteville police called in bloodhounds from Fort Smith and the city was again scoured for signs of the elusive shooter. On Tuesday Officer Guinn stopped a Fort Smith-bound car, but the black man inside the vehicle was not Williams. Later Williams's sister was trailed because she was carrying "a bundle" with her, but that turned out to be a false lead as well.

Wednesday morning Williams was reportedly seen near the Sigma Chi house close to the university campus, where another man worked whom Williams believed had shown undue attention to his wife. In this case Williams, it was said, had vowed to "get his man," but once again the lead played out and the killer remained at large.

Around eight o'clock Thursday night, through the intervention of his brother-in-law Duck Macklin and another man, Arco Hall, a tired and hungry—he'd gone three days without food—Everett Williams finally surrendered to police. Macklin and Hall had found Deputy Sheriff Bob Day sitting on the jailhouse steps that night

and informed him that Williams was ready to give himself up if an officer "would come to him unarmed in 'back of the jail.'" Without hesitation, Day removed his gun and with Macklin and Hall at Williams's side, the deputy sheriff placed the killer into police custody, assuring the worried man that he needn't fear "mobbing" —one of Williams' major concerns during his flight from the law —and that he "would be granted a fair trial."

The trial of Everett Williams began in the Washington County Courthouse promptly at nine A.M. on Monday, May 8, 1928, Circuit Court Judge J. S. Maples presiding. Jury selection ran until around 10:25 A.M. and after several men had been excused by their membership in "a secret organization supposed to be prejudiced against the [black] race," twelve suitable jurors were duly sworn in.

Seventeen witnesses were called for examination in the open session, including Sam and Embras Young, Patrolman Burson, Patrolman Neil Cruse (later to become chief of police and the subject of corruption charges in the 1930s), Williams's wife Henrietta, and lastly, Williams himself.

The Young brothers testified first, with Embras stating again that Williams had fired the first shot in the gun battle with Patrolman McPherson. The defense strategy, as presented by court-appointed attorneys J. Wythe Walker and Donald Trumbo (soon to become city attorney), was to present Officer McPherson as a "homespoiler who made love to Williams' wife while the latter was imprisoned and unable to protect his home."

Attorney Walker, taking the defense lead, described Williams as "innocent" and as having "a right to self-defense and defense of his home and fireside." Williams, the lawyer attempted to convince the jury, was "a wronged man."

The unidentified prosecutors—the Washington County prosecuting attorney was J. S. Combs of Rogers and George A. Hurst was Fayetteville city attorney at the time—argued that Williams had not only fired the first shot but had been planning to do so all day. McPherson, they argued, had himself only acted in self-defense.

They also squeezed out of Williams the admission that he was "angry" at Patrolman McPherson when he, Williams, first got his

gun and that he was also looking for a man named Levi Ross whom Williams believed had also been "courting" Mrs. Williams while Everett was in jail.

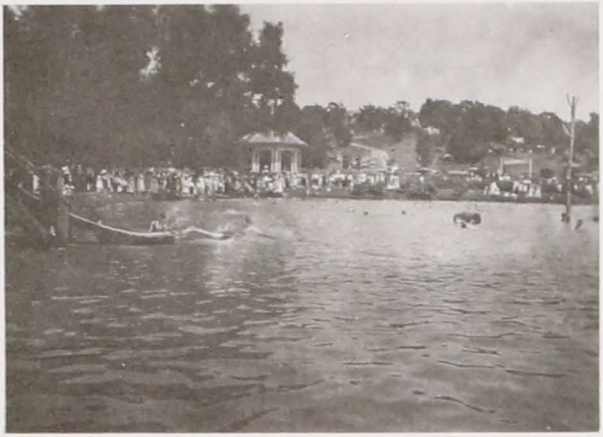
At 1:30 P.M. the prosecution rested its case and at 3:30 began final arguments to the jury. Closing arguments by both the prosecution and the defense were described as "brief." Around six P.M. the jury adjourned to deliberate the case and the multiple charges against Williams: first-degree murder, second-degree murder, voluntary and involuntary manslaughter. Nearly one hundred people were reported to have lingered in the courtroom in anticipation of the final verdict.

The jury deliberated the case against Everett Williams for only three hours, returning to court with their verdict around nine P.M. The twelve men found Williams guilty of second-degree murder in the death of Patrolman Lem McPherson.

Williams did not have to wait long to hear the final disposition of his case. Immediately after the verdict, Judge Maples sentenced the convicted killer to a term of twenty-one years' imprisonment to be served at the Arkansas State Penitentiary. With Williams's sentencing, this shocking and tragic episode—one of the most extraordinary in Fayetteville history—came to an end.

SOURCE

Fayetteville Daily Democrat, April 30, May 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8, 1928. Quotations and details of the case are from the newspaper, chronological sequencing, summary, and narrative by the author.



The Fayetteville City Park (now Wilson Park) in 1918. These photos were taken by William J. Baerg (Courtesy Gretchen Baerg Gearhart).

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